

Iggeret ha-Kodesh: The Principles of Rabbinical Love in terms of Creativity, Morality and Mysticism

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Since the days of Adam and Eve, since the time when one became two, nobody has been able to live without wanting to put himself in his neighbour's place and explore his situation, even while trying to see it objectively.¹

Introduction

The *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* or *Letter of Sanctity* is a sacred letter traditionally provided to young Jewish men before marriage to prepare them for the mysteries of love: it addresses what to do, why, and what it means in spiritual terms. It is assumed that such recipients are *yeshiva* students in late adolescence, who have spent most of their lives in study, and therefore, aside from their own mothers and sisters at home, have had very little, if any, contact with women. Such readers are taken to be naïve but intelligent, inexperienced as to the procedures of love-making, and perhaps frightened by the expectations married life will place on them. On the other hand, given their intellectual training, these young men understand the processes of Talmudic argumentation and are familiar with abstruse allusions and forms of metaphorical language.

The original document's provenance remains somewhat ambiguous and controversial. However, it is variously understood as arising in the tenth or the twelfth or even fifteenth century, probably as an evolving compilation.² Although still promoted by the Lubavitch Chasidim³ through the commentary of

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¹ Thomas Mann, *Young Joseph*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 324.

² One of the best discussions on this matter is Biti Roi, 'Iggeret ha-Kodesh', *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, at <http://jwa.org/wencyclopedia/author/roi-biti>. Accessed 14/7/2012.

³ Recent studies on the ArtScroll series of sacred texts and their translations indicate that the allegorical methods developed by the Hasidic movement have been taking over

their founding rebbe's⁴ central document, the *Tanya*, the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* can be approached as a product of more speculative rabbinical philosophy revealing traditional Jewish ideas about love; love in its physiological, psychological and social terms, as well as love manifesting in cosmological and cultural values.⁵ David Ackerman, a Conservative Rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary in America, points out that its key intellectual interest lies in the way it addresses "the gap between priestly concerns for purity (and their echoes in later rabbinic law) and our intuition about sex and sexuality."⁶ It is at this interface between ancient views of *tum'ah* or ritual impurity as warned against in Leviticus for those priests and Levites serving in the Temple and what is *tamor*, purity, or what ensures the production of *kedushah*, holiness appropriate for such worshipful duties, that subsequent rabbinical discussions arise: on the part of each Jewish male, study of the sacred texts becomes the equivalent of priestly

popular cultural understanding of Judaism in communities and individuals. That is, however, a separate story to be told in another article.

⁴ In Yiddish *rebbe* is the ordinary term for 'Mr', but among Hasidic circles, especially the Lubavitch, it is the term designating their dynamistic head. The Alter Rebbe who developed the movement in the late nineteenth century wrote this major compendium which is now the basis of their Hasidic principles.

⁵ On the distinction between Hasidic attitudes and methods of interpretations and those of more traditional rabbinic Judaism, see Moshe Idel 'Hermeneutics in Hasidism', *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* vol. 25, no. 9 (2012), pp. 3-16. In the early twenty-first century, it is possible to say that most Jews are non-religious or not versed in Talmudic study, and therefore the popularity of Hasidic ideologies—especially after Martin Buber's idealistic writings in the early part of the twentieth century—have made it difficult to distinguish between traditional orthodoxies and the radical antinomianism of Lurianic written collections and early Hasidic teachings and the later integration of kabbalistic learning into mainstream discourses on Jewish ideas and practices. Certainly pre-nineteenth-century collections of mystical speculation have entered into the normative canon of many synagogue liturgies and philosophical thought, but this has come at great expense, such as the loss of medieval commentaries outside of the Nachmanidean circle or the Sephardic *chochamim* (rabbinical sages) in Mediterranean lands, as José Faur has repeatedly stressed. Nineteenth and twentieth century Hasidim, particularly the Lubavitcher dynasty, have simplified even these early kabbalistic ideas, transforming them into easy formulae—as one can see in the allegorical 'translations' of the ArtScroll series from Brooklyn, New York—somehow integrating legal reasoning or *pilpul* and techniques such as letter manipulations and *gematria* into a new mysticism.

⁶ David Ackerman, 'Parashat Mtzora: Leviticus 14:1-15:33, Triennial Reading 14:1-32', (12 April 2008/Nissan 5768), at www.jtsa.edu/Conservative_Judaism/JTS_Torah_Commentary/Mtzora_5768.xml?ss=print. Accessed 14/7/2012.

avodah, work or service, but so too does the *mitzvah* (ritual obligation and pleasure) of sexual intercourse for the sake of procreation; the need to marry, to make one's wife feel sexually aroused, personally respected, and physically at ease during the act of intercourse. Thus, unlike the views expressed in Maimonides that *pace* Aristotle "the sense of touch is disgraceful" (*The Guide to the Perplexed*, Part 2, Chapter 33), copulation is a sacred duty and one potentially filled with an abundance of pleasure the couple share with God.⁷ Sexual activity and pleasure are not necessary evils, but what is sinful is selfishness, insensitivity, and lack of love. The ideal goes beyond merely having good sex or ensuring a well-made foetus and child. The pleasure of sex (physically and psychologically considered) belongs to the category of honouring God and the wife, who is flesh of one's flesh, should be a full partner in this exaltation of service. If one or both of the partners to this sacred duty falls short, there is a danger that the act will be impure, that is, there will be no engendering of a new and continuing generation of Jews to pass on the duties of the Law, no beautiful pleasures in honour of God, and hence no participation in the ongoing cosmic act of Creation.⁸

To see how the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* conceives of these ideals, the modern reader must provide new contexts and extrapolate the inner mechanisms of analysis at work in its medieval rhetoric, and then discuss the implications in terms of a modern physiology-psychology of love. In order to understand this important medieval treatise on sexual love, it is best to follow the four-fold path of rabbinical explication that goes by the acronym of PaRDeS, *pardes* the heavenly Garden of Eden. The four letters of the acronym—פרדס *pe, resh, dalet* and *sod*—stand for first for *Pshat*, the accepted meaning of a text, that is, how it is understood to direct and justify the current interpretation of the Law; second for *Remez*, the drawing of analogies and discovery of contexts that give the text

⁷ Roi, 'Iggeret ha-Kodesh'.

⁸ Postmodernist Jewish mysticism phrases these requirements in terms less appropriate to the 'as-if' language of Temple worship and the creation of the universe. For instance, in 'Authentic Jewish Mysticism and Thought based on the teachings of Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh', "[t]he goal of marriage is that the couple manifest in their earthly consciousness the existential oneness they found in their celestial soul-root ... to learn to relate to interact properly with one another ... Establishing and maintaining a proper living relationship can therefore be seen as the rectification of the 'spatial' manifestation of their intrinsic unity... As a result ... [t]hey have transcended space and exist together in time ... love and true romance deepen in both the conscious levels of their souls and in their mutual 'collective consciousness' ... their sense of independent selfhood disappears ..." (1996-2011) online at www.inner.org/covenant/marr09. Accessed 14/7/2012. How authentic this Judaism may be is questionable; it may be very good Buddhism, or some New Age variant thereof.

its various kinds of sense within the context of rabbinical debate and argument; third for *Drash*, the explication of significance through example, anecdote, instance and allegory; and lastly *Sod*, the secret meaning, not as an occult mystery beyond reason, but the meaning revealed through manipulation of letters, analysis of acronymic codes, *gematria* or mathematical equivalents and formulae based on the fact that each letter has a numerical value, and other playful and witty readings of the size, shape, colour, or peculiarities of the text as a written record of the revelatory moments of its constant re-creation.

Authorship, Provenance and Genre

Joseph Dan gives an over-all view of the current debates on the authorship and provenance of this important Holy Epistle. The letter, according to him, at least in its current form, has been in print since at least the late sixteenth century.⁹ But whether originating in the ninth, twelfth or later centuries, the *Iggeret* is, as Dan says, “an anthology of quotations and interpretations of Talmudic and midrashic sayings about sexual relations. The work may be regarded, moreover, as a polemical answer to both Aristotle and Maimonides who regarded sexual activity as being a lower, because less spiritual, level of life.”¹⁰ Moshé Idel places emphasis on the way the *Letter* shows the manifestation of God in female form as the *Shekhina*, so that the approach to the Godhead develops in an allegory of sexuality between a man and a woman.¹¹ But the question of allegory is not a simple one, and though we cannot go into all the aspects of the problem that lie within the word and the concept, it may be said that for a majority of the rabbis *allegoresis* is not what the classical Greeks or the Christians meant by the term. Neither Platonic (and Neoplatonic) extended metaphors meant to override a this-worldly materialism by symbolically representing a higher, more real, and completely spiritual otherness nor an Aristotelian attempt to purify the filthy and polluted realities by finding essences of primary elements find a place in mainstream rabbinical traditions and kabbalistic excursions.¹² Unlike Christian mysticism, which is often based on the Song of Songs and associated with the

⁹ Charles Mopsik, *Lettre sur la sainteté (Iguret ha-Qodech), ou La relation de l'homme avec sa femme (Hibour ha-adam'im ichto)* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1993).

¹⁰ ‘Iggeret ha-Kodesh’, *Jewish Virtual Library* (2012), at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/judaics/ejud_000_0009_09476. Accessed 25/4/2012.

¹¹ Moshé Idel, ‘Métaphores et pratiques sexuelle dans la cabale’, originally published as an appendix to Mopsik’s edition and translation of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1988), at www.chez.com/jec2/idelmetasex. Accessed 26/8/2002.

¹² Idel, ‘Métaphores et pratiques sexuelle dans la cabale’, contrasts both horizontal and vertical forms of imagery and theosophical and ecstatic forms of Kabbalah.

romantic images of the Virgin Mary as mother and lover of Jesus Christ, the rabbinical text sees—and indeed, requires¹³—that the devotees engage in real marital acts: physical love is not transcended, it is sacralised.¹⁴ Idel thus tends to derive the *Iggeret* from Abraham Aboulafia's ecstatic version of *kabbalah*, or at least from his school where the perfect Israel, as a collective as well as in each individual, can manifest the Active Intellect and achieve the *unio mystico*.¹⁵ The

¹³ In addition to the purely theoretical ideas in the rabbinical argument, there is also the fact that these Jewish commentators were neither priests nor monks, and were married men with families, thus familiar with the physical pleasures and rewards of sexual matters. They were as concerned with granting pleasure to their wives and raising large families, as well as with seeking to cleave ecstatically to God and to share with the divine the joys of sexuality and fatherhood. Sexual union did not for them stand in place of something intellectual and spiritual; it was the medium through which intellect and spirit expressed themselves. As Idel points out, theory explains how actions on earth influence events in heaven, yet he does not go far enough to see the way in which human and divine meet within the ecstasy of sexual relations between a husband and a wife, a third party always present in these intimacies, the mysterious manifestation of God. When God is not there—and His reality and presence are generated by the intensity and purity of the love-making—the consequences are pain, humiliation and a break between the generations.

¹⁴ “The *Canticle [of Canticles]* for the Fathers of the Church and all the great mystics of the Middle Ages is the epithalamium of the Word and the soul become by its love the spouse of Christ,” Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. and trans. M.-M. Davy (Paris: 1958) p. 9. Like Bernard of Clairvaux, Guillaume sees the carnal elements in this marriage as the first step towards God's love, as the mystic passes from *amor* through *dialectio* and *caritas* to *unitas*. As far back as Origen, a Church Father heretically close to Jewish ideals, the love between a husband and a wife is valuable only insofar as it is transcended, and for a true Christian mystic the carnality of marriage exists only in figurative form. See Origenes, *Homelies sur la Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. and trans. Dom G. Rousseau (Paris, 1954). Not only is the female body constituted by filth and present a temptation to be avoided, but the sexual act pollutes and drives the male sinner mad in this Christian formulation; whereas in the rabbinical model discussed in this paper, the human bride and fertile mother are sacred in themselves, made even more so by the penetration of the circumcised organ and therefore must be approached respectfully through the lover-husband intent on fulfilling the *mitzvoth* of procreation.

¹⁵ David B. Levy, reviewing Alain Finkelkraut, *The Wisdom of Love* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) for *H-Reviews* (February 2000) talks about Finkelkraut's aversion to traditional Jewish views of love and sexuality. He writes that, “For Finkelkraut the rabbinic impulse to establish a crucial link between human love and love of God for his people Israel is seen as a kind of repression by the rabbis into ‘a fortress of theological armor.’ Finkelkraut does not search for the reasons why Rabbi Akiba refers to the Song of Songs as ‘the holy of holies’ of the Biblical corpus.

goal of the sexual congress is the reproduction of the human person. One anonymous sage is cited as saying:

If your seminal drop is after you [that is, reflects or embodies the intellect focused on the image of God], the *Shekhina* remains [below in this world], but if your seminal drop is not after you, upon what will the *Shekhina* rest, on the trees or on the stones?" Procreation is thus indispensable to the realization of the ideal state of the *Shekhina*, not only is She present during the act of union between husband and wife, but thanks to the productive nature of this act, she continues to reside below [in this world].¹⁶

A Non-Jewish Counter-Text

Remarkably, there is a rather bizarre novel written by Emile Zola in the mid-nineteenth century about a psychotic pair of lovers. In *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola's narrative provides a kind of counter-textual analogy to the descriptions and debates in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*.¹⁷ It helps us frame aspects of the medieval

Finkelkraut is also not interested in the way commentaries on the Song of Songs, especially reflect the changing ways of Jewish reading that might be perceived by studying those commentaries on *Shir HaShirim* offered during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by R. Isaac Arama, R. Yohanan Alemanno, R., Ovadiah Sforno, and the Kabbalist R. Moshe Alshikh. Finkelkraut also does not draw on some Jewish mystical beliefs that see in sexual passion between a man and his wife, the model of reintegration of the divine unity, a view which also has some correlations with the Holy Letter, ascribed to Nahamanides [sic]. A work that substantiates the holiness of legitimate sexual relations between a husband and wife. Neither does Finkelkraut turn to more normative tendencies towards modesty in Jewish thought when treating eroticism," at www.h-net.org/reviews/showrey.php?id=3842. Accessed 16/7/2012.

¹⁶ "Le sage anonyme poursuit: 'Si ta semence est après toi, la Chekhina réside [en bas], s'il n'y a pas de semence après toi, sur qui la Chekhina résiderait, sur les arbres et sur les pierres ?' La procréation est donc indispensable à la réalisation de l'état idéal de la Chekhina, non seulement Elle est présente durant l'acte même d'union entre mari et femme, mais grâce à la nature productive de cet acte, elle continue à résider en bas," Idel, 'Métaphores et pratiques', p. 4.

¹⁷ Another late nineteenth-century novel, *En route* by Joris-Karl Huysmans, offers clues as to how the mysticism of the Jews differs from that of the Christians. For instance, Durtal, the hero of the book, seeks advice from a priest in his quest for understanding the inner processes of divine love. The Abbé Gévresin who guides Durtal by exploring the lives and writings of the saints says of Saint Teresa—and it is surely no coincidence that this connects to the Thérèse Raquin of Zola's novel—"But in order to speak correctly, we must forget the ordinary use of expressions which have been degraded. In order to describe the mysterious love, we are obliged to draw our comparisons from human acts, and to inflict on the Lord the shame of our words. We have to employ such terms as 'union,' 'marriage,' 'wedding feast,' but it is impossible to speak of the

Jewish text in ways appropriate to the present era. Zola's novel is concerned with the way in which two people fall into a passion that proves to be more than just anti-social, in that it brings about the murder of the woman's first husband and leads towards increasingly disruptive and violent circumstances in the home, but seems to take over their minds, causes hallucinations, and runs their individualities into a kind of shared insanity. As we shall note later, in this extreme form of lust and sterile love, the French novel forces modern scholars to see some aspects of the rabbinical text that have not been explored before, especially the way the husband and wife complete their own religious duties through sexual intercourse and enhance each other's intelligence and imaginations by the intensity of their feelings. Unlike many classical and Christian moralists who argue for the suppression or displacement of sexuality into more abstract and spiritual dimensions of expression, the Jewish text sees in the desires and fulfilments of the sexual urge a means of spiritualizing the world, of investing the material universe and the human physiology with divine empowerment.¹⁸

unspeakable, and with the baseness of our language declare the ineffable immersion of the soul in God," Huysmans, *En route*, trans. W. Fleming (1894), p. 53. Catholic mystical discourse here is a matter of words replacing ineffable acts, and words which represent normally degraded human acts, in other words, allegory. In Jewish mystical thought, however, since the marriage and the sexual intercourse of man and woman is not degraded, but a duty and a pleasure, a *mitzvah*, the language does not insult the dignity of God any more than does the performance of marital union into which God is invited to join; the sexuality of husband and wife is enhanced by the presence of the divine, and is idealized in the union of God and the *Shekhina*, his wife, consort and projected shadow of Himself.

¹⁸ Israel Chait, *Philosophy of Torah* (a collection of essays with students' transcriptions and notes from lectures), p. 11, at mordecaizvi.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/philosophyoftorah.pdf. Accessed 20/7/2012. Rabbi Chait is Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva B'nai Torah in Far Rockaway, New York. See also Olivia Wiznitzer, 'The Jewish Perspective on Sexuality', *Yeshiva University Observer* (29 December 2008), at www.yuobserver.com/features/the-jewish-perspective--on-sexuality-1,2470356?compArticle=yes. Accessed 14/7/2012. Wiznitzer makes a careful analysis of words and phrases for pleasure such as *vetzer hara* in biblical and Talmudic Hebrew, in which the primary signification seems to be close to 'spice' or 'relish', in the sense of something that adds piquancy and makes palatable what might otherwise be dull and tasteless. Those who translate within a medical or negatively moralistic dimension miss the point, she argues. Above all, she rejects the notion that sex is meant primarily for procreation and the pleasures of the sexual act are secondary and dangerous; the rabbis stress that the act and the ecstasy bring a husband closer to his wife, as it brings both of them closer to God, who shares in the joys of sex. "Torah channels and elevates one's sexual desires, elevating and sanctifying them," she

A Question of Mysticism

While the paradigms of science and mysticism upon which the rabbinical discourses used to hang have been superseded by more sophisticated paradigms, the ancient metaphors can be used as just that: figurative language, not as the substance of the theory of love. This is because, as Rabbi Israel Chait observes,

the Torah accepts a framework similar to the one a scientist employs. It accepts the world of sense perception and the human mind. The events that occurred at Sinai are according to Torah valid evidence from which a rational person would conclude that a) There exists a deity, b) That this deity is concerned with man, and c) This deity entrusted Moses with the task of conveying his system of laws to the people.¹⁹

What constitutes science in any given period changes in history but the ideals of the law remain the same behind and within the metaphoric language. In addition, as Chait further points out, since the inner voices of inspiration and revelation come in the way of all other subjective experiences, unwarranted beliefs, including so-called miracles, have to be tested against three things: the practical and systematic understanding of nature, the traditional beliefs of history as articulated in logical arguments, and the careful reading of sacred texts by respected authorities. "Judaism considers its greatest adversary the unbridled religious emotion of man," according to Chait, and therefore regards "knowledge as the only means of determining its practice and worship." For this reason, "[f]alsehood is equated with evil, the good with true knowledge."²⁰ Torah means not only the written scriptures written and expounded at Sinai plus the oral Torah continuously developed by the rabbis ever since, but the very process of engaging this double Torah with the world and the constant testing of its application in the reality of nature and history. Thus we find Maimonides writing in his *Code of Laws* in the section concerning prohibition of intercourse:

there is no such thing as a truly righteous person other than he who is a possessor of knowledge who keeps the laws and understand them (Chapter 14, Law 3).²¹

The sexual act, both in its divine and human dimensions, is also seen as explicative of the way in which the Law is expounded, texts interpreted, and

says. "the sexual act when performed within one's marriage, is pure and holy, and serves to create *deyek* [lit. clinging, meaning closeness], bringing man and wife closer together."

¹⁹ Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 21.

²⁰ Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 27.

²¹ Cited in Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 27.

judicial decisions in regard to application reached. At the extreme of such interpretations of the sexualizing of cognitive abilities, the Vilna Gaon (the Lithuanian Rabbi Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman Kremer), one of the leaders of the early nineteenth-century Orthodoxy movement opposed to the Hasidic sect of mystical pietists, said of a passage in the section *Or Yahel* of the *Zohar* that, “one should study only when one has an erection, ever *chai*” (the rock or hardness of life). The merging of the sexes and the sharing of reproductive attributes can also be seen in the way the *Zohar* imagines prayer: “When one prays she or he should be aroused and become the feminine waters of the *Shechina*.” The Ba’al Shem Tov, or Besht, the founder of modern Hasidism in the early eighteenth century, claimed that “[e]cstatic swaying motion (*shuckling*) during prayer is like the rocking of a couple in lovemaking.”²² In fact, this is summed up by the *Tzvaat HaRivash* No. 68 in this way:

Prayer is *zivug* (coupling) with the *Shechinah*. Just as there is motion at the beginning of coupling, so too, one must sway at the beginning of prayer. Thereafter one can stand still, without motion, attached to the *Shechinah* with great *devekut* (attachment).²³

Thus the actual performance of sexual union as a physical and mystical exercise, however, begins long before the *zivug* or copulation of husband and wife. There is also a life-long preparation of the organs for this function through circumcision. Eliot R. Wolfson sums up the argument this way:

Through exegesis, that which was concealed, hidden, closed—in a word, esoteric—becomes opened, disclosed, manifest—in a word, exoteric. The uncovering of the phallus is consequently and structurally parallel to the disclosure of the text.²⁴

In some of the most difficult unravelling of the textual knots in the mystical texts, the metaphor works out as saying that when the prepuce of the penis is cut away, extracting one highly sacred drop of blood, the appearance of the male organ transforms into that of the female, and of an eye that can see into the great mysteries of the divine. At such an intensity and depth of understanding through

²² *Shuckling* refers to horizontal movement of the upper body, while *davening* (often used to mean praying in general) refers to the forward bending and return movements of the worshipper.

²³ This and two previous paraphrases are among a larger selection of similar allusions collected by Rabbi Baruch Ha Levi of the Congregation Sharat Hayam in Swampscott, MA, near Boston, as study notes under the title ‘The Erotic and The Holy’, at www.congregationshiriyathayam.org. Accessed 9/8/2012.

²⁴ Eliot R. Wolfson, ‘Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: from Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol’, *History of Religions*, vol. 27 (1987), pp. 191–192.

interpretation, the removal of the foreskin, the penetration of the female, the return to primal androgyny, the engendering of a new living being, the return to unity of the *Shekhina* and God, the union of mankind and the divine, and the understanding of the Law all become one intricate event. “Through circumcision, then,” Wolfson explains, “one merits to stand in the presence of God, or, to put it differently, the appearance of God is itself the reward for the prior act of fulfilling the divine decree.”²⁵

Extrapolating a Speculative and Aesthetic Meaning and Function

That kind of love, when drawn out of its discursive covering, can be seen to be dynamic, integrative and strengthening, in other words, concerned with real things and processes, seeking to create binding cooperative relationships, and socially cohesive for the whole of the community in which the loving couple marry and reproduce. When the male member is marked by the *brit milah* or *ot ha-brit*; the *brit* is the covenantal relationship that comes into effect when the contract is, at were, signed through the removal of the prepuce and the drawing of a single drop of blood, the *milah* is the word of agreement, the revealed text, and the interpretative process of understanding, while the *ot* is the mark or symbol inscribed in the flesh through the removal of flesh, and the transformation of the incomplete male into the unified male and female.²⁶ “Circumcision effects a change in the very substance of the individual,” according to Wolfson’s reading of the kabbalistic texts.²⁷ Similarly, through the same process analogy—that is, a transformative act created by sharing in the same processes of symbolization and interpretation, or midrashing—the sexual act becomes more and other than the kind of copulation beasts of the field engage in or non-sanctified and non-focused husband and wives share. The female is transformed too in her flesh and blood through the acceptance of the circumcised male organ, as the two partners merge through their love, the husband enacting the role of the heavenly father and the female that of the *Shekhina* or heavenly mother. Of one peculiarly interesting text where the gender reversals are played with, and the boundaries between the profane and the sacred are breached, Wolfson claims:

the midrashist forges an unambiguous connection between the capability of beholding the Presence or Glory of God [i.e., the *Shekhina*] and circumcision: he who is uncircumcised will fall on his face—as Abraham did before his circumcision—in the

²⁵ Wolfson, ‘Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation’, p. 193.

²⁶ *Brit* (in Yiddish *bris*) means covenant, and by metonymy, the ceremony of circumcision; *milah* means word and *ot* means letter, sign or symbol.

²⁷ Wolfson, ‘Circumcision and Interpretation’, p. 197.

presence of God's manifestation. The alleged reason for this is given by the *midrash* itself: the foreskin is a blemish that acts as a barrier separating the individual and God.²⁸

But our understanding of the ingenious midrashic readings of these texts, especially that of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, can make sense to us only when we read against the grain of more modern processes of thought.²⁹ The best way to come

²⁸ Wolfson, 'Circumcision and Interpretation', p. 197.

²⁹ There are some today, because of a postmodernism that would level out all forms of belief as equal or equally valid, who take literally the copulation of God and the *Shekhina*, a mythical sexual encounter between supernatural bodies; as though the Jewish tradition had not for millennia struggled against this kind of idolatry, his embodiment of the divine. But while, as Art Green says in 'Finding the Hidden Light of Kabbalah', "there is never a rejection of the prior tradition, [there] is rather a reinterpretation and adapting of the prior tradition," an interpretation that has already transformed the *mythos* into *logos*, and then reassembles the particles of language and energy that was thus created into a higher vision of reality. That vision comes in images which are also or even more vividly words, that is, words in the larger dimension of energetic particles, sparks of the original creative voice of God. It might be said that in the formative period of rabbinical Judaism and Christianity, the tension within the older tradition between *mythos* and *logos* followed the fault lines between the two emerging belief systems. See Daniel Boyarin, ' "This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel": Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18 (1992), pp. 474-505. Hellenizing Jews joined with the Platonizing Christian faction, including Flavius Josephus, Philo Judaeus, and Paul, with the rabbinical party of Pharisees and other sages forming incipient Talmudic communities and midrashic schools. The Platonic allegorizing also disparaged the physical, the material, the feminine and the sexual, whereas midrashic texts, historical events and human experience tends to see meaning literally embedded in created reality and not merely symbolized by it: Adam does not monopolize meaning, leaving the outer covering or veil to Eve, the woman. As Boyarin notes, "*Midrash Rabbah*, the first extended compilation of approved commentaries in the midrashic form, shows the Hebrew Bible to be a self-glossing work and hermeneutics as a process of connecting concrete signifiers—not as a process of replacing concrete signifiers with their spiritual meanings," Boyarin, ' "This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel": Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel,' p. 480. Whereas Christianity would also therefore be concerned with historical logic to ensure that the narratives and characters were consistent with one another in order to prove a logical discourse pointing towards a consistent allegorical meaning, my contention is that rabbinical Judaism is always midrashic its own interpretations of texts, textualizing its own experience of history, and preventing history and experience from being closed-down by predetermined spiritual patterns of meaning. The secret of *Kabbalah* therefore is that there is no hidden meaning which once disclosed wafts the mystic into a zone of perfect, calm and unchanging Truth, but that the universe—the one we dwell in through history and the one to come in its

to such a reading *au rebours*, against the grain, is by taking the kind of books which almost seem familiar to us but yet contain sufficient uncanny and shocking strangeness in them that we can look beyond those assumptions in our mentality that seem purely natural, common sense and normative.³⁰

Zola's novel, like the many essays and studies on love, women, family and child-rearing in the nineteenth century comes close to the kind of love found

ultimate manifestation of divine union—is always open, always changing, and therefore always a place of free will. As in Lamarckism, so in allegory eventually by cutting off the prepuce every male will be born circumcised, whereas in Darwinism and in midrash, every new generation must be circumcised anew, in the physical sense of removing a piece of flesh and inscribing the covenant into the male member, in the metaphorical sense of preparing the self-mind to receive revelation, to argue for the sake of Heaven, and to apply the Law in the most appropriate sense possible for the current circumstances, and in the social, psychological sense of sharing with and learning from the woman the pleasures and productivity of sexual union. Boyarin points out that for early Christians, following Paul and the Platonic allegorizers, circumcision was a rejection of the flesh and the material world in order to transcend and achieve salvation of the soul, for the rabbis the midrashing of the male member and the commandments to engender and multiply means a sanctification of the flesh and the historical world we live in. Specifically, “[i]n contrast to Paul and his followers, for whom the interpretation of circumcision was a rejection of the body, for the Rabbis of the midrash it is a sign of the sanctification of that very physical body; the cut in the penis completes the inscription of God's name on the body. It speaks of circumcision as a transformation of the body into a holy object,” Boyarin, ‘“This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel”: Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel’, p. 491.

³⁰ In September 2012, David Shasha, in a review of José Faur's *The Horizontal Society*, called attention to the pernicious views expressed by Daniel Boyarin: “A few months ago, Berkeley professor Daniel Boyarin, considered by many as the pre-eminent scholar of rabbinic literature in the academy today, published a deeply troubling popular study called *The Jewish Gospels*. The book is likely not all that shocking to those who study the Talmud in an academic setting, but for those who do not keep up with the ongoing marginalization of the Talmud and the way it has—like the Hebrew Bible—been belittled by academics, it will come as a nasty wake-up call” (11 September 2012), at <http://betdawid.weebly.com>. Accessed 20/9/2013. Faur's book tries to counteract the contemporary trend embodied in Boyarin's work by expounding the Sephardic-Andalusian tradition of rabbinical legal and philological studies, not rejecting or adopting *holus bolus* Greek philosophy in its pre-Christian or its Christianized forms, but adapting it cautiously and intelligently. We have attempted to tease out from Boyarin's work what is good, to treat critically what remains dubious, and to reject what is unkosher. At the same time, our argument does not put aside completely kabbalistic narratives and mythical thinking, as they have proved long before and after the *Zohar*, a fruitful place for speculative philosophy and poetic creativity within Judaism.

in *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* but does not fit all its premises and implications. The reading to be given of *Thérèse Raquin* will at once provide external confirmation to the insights of the Holy Letter and make clear through gaps and contrasts what is specific to the rabbinical point of view. Rabbi Chait thus avers that “[t]he word *emunah* [truth] means verification of a truth from an external source (see Genesis 42:20 and Exodus 14:31). It does not mean blind religious faith.”³¹ Instead, it means a trust in the process that is set forth as circumcision and sexual intercourse, an act of cutting the body and drawing blood, on the one hand, and an act of giving oneself up momentarily to ecstatic pleasures and entering physically into the body of another human being. These are dangerous, transitional moments, to be prepared for by meditation and study. They prepare for and make possible the intercourse with the divine being. Circumcision feminizes the male body and entrusts it to the female who receives it and receives the fertilizing white drop of seminal fluid, the wife joins with the husband in the ecstasy of pleasure that pleases God and stimulates the divine copulation with the *Shekhina*, in momentary union, each such separate moment continuing in an endless process of world-creation. For a moment, too, the husband and wife become one, their blood exchanged and joined, their genders enhanced in one another: just as when in crossing through the Red Sea, men and women were equal in their vision of God.³²

Four Modalities of Interpretation: *PaRDeS*

What follows now is a brief outline and primary commentary on the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, the paraphrase of the ancient document acting as an interpretation that leads towards a modern understanding of the text and its implications.

1. Pshat: What it seems to be as an artefact of tradition

This *Letter of Sanctity* is composed of a *Préambule* and six chapters. In the **Preamble**, the unnamed author addresses himself to a young man, possibly a student or disciple, one who is at the age when he contemplates getting married. This is part of the journey of life along the paths of Truth to the gates of Justice, towards the great menorah of heavenly light, the goal of heavenly duties. The journey requires marriage, the coupling of male and female for the

³¹ Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 55. He sums up, “the word ‘emunah’ has no counterpart in the English language. Words are representations of ideas, the ideas of Torah are unique and are often incapable of translation. We may interpret them through many words or phrase, the objective of Torah is to activate the divine element in man, which according to our scholars is the intellectual faculty,” Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, 63.

³² Boyarin, ‘“This We Know”,’ p. 497.

reproduction of a son dedicated to heavenly duties in turn. Everything turns on the word *hibour*, which like *zvoug*, means the performance of the sexual act, but with the sense of an act of noble intimacy, rather than only a conjugation of bodies. In other words, in the words of Israel Chait, “[s]ymbolic performance is the basis of the most primitive religious practices, practices which the Torah abhors and warns incessantly against.”³³ The act of sexual congress, therefore, is not merely a symbolic ritual but a real-world experience in nature that is understood in intellectual terms as participating with God in His own on-going creation of the world and thereby the married couple whose minds are aware of this share with God in the pleasure and accomplishment of this divine action. The husband and wife make manifest in their love-making the divine power and produce the next generation of piety.³⁴

In **Chapter I**, the reader is told that Israel is separated from all other nations by its union with the unspeakable Name of God. Indeed, Israel is as close to the deity as His own name, and they are made holy through their service to this unspeakable appellation. That name moreover forms the sum total of all the divine acts of God and of His people. The whole of the Torah—both in its written form given at Sinai to Moses in order to instruct all the people and upon which the covenant is sworn and in its oral form as it is forever expounded and expanded through discourse and the performance of *mitzvoth* or heavenly deeds—is nothing but the Name of God writ large through wisdom and history. In the material world of time and space, however, the word needs to be constantly purified and reproduced, and each person is born with a temperament that must be conceived in purity and maintained through study and good actions. The duties thus begin with the seminal drop of fertility created during the sexual act. It must be produced with good intentions, placed properly in the body of the woman with care and love, and then nurtured through further acts of love until the conceived foetus has become a human being at birth. Love consists of ensuring the production of the pure drop with due intentions of serving God, the care with which it is projected into the female, and the love by which it is protected through its life within the mother.

³³ Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 60.

³⁴ Wolfson, ‘Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation’, points out that not only does the *Zohar* use the language of sexuality to depict figuratively the mystical union of God and human being (a general rhetorical trope in many religious traditions) but that precisely as the conceit of this penetration of the of the female by the male becomes manifest in an actual physical intercourse, the elaboration of the idea requires that the male organ be circumcised in order to keep the act from becoming one of idolatry, Wolfson, ‘Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation’, p. 190.

In **Chapter II**, wherein the first path to sanctification is described, deals with the essence of the sexual relationship. The core of its meaning is that the drop of semen derives not from the genital area but from the brain, and thus the mind of the lover, and thus how this conscious mind is disposed—educated, dedicated and concentrated—determined the sanctity of the fluid deposited in the female body. In the creation of the first beings, Adam and Eve, each male and female as a unified person and then reproduced as two individual persons, their flesh and blood are sacred, as is the soul that comes into them, and the act which reunites them in sexual conjugation is also a sacred and purifying action. The flesh is good because made by God and the sexual act is holy because decreed by God, and the pleasures derived from the performance of this *zvoug* are good because they allow the male and female to participate with God in the original and ongoing creation of the universe. Nonetheless, because one of the greatest gifts to mankind is free will, each person has it within their abilities to bring about impure acts and deeds. Failure to understand the meaning of the acts, loss of attention on the higher meaning of the goal, and lack of love for the other in the performance of the sexual deed, all these can impede the reproduction of a holy soul in the newborn child. Between male and female, there is this distinction to be made: “Man is in himself the secret of Wisdom, and woman the secret of Intelligence, and their coupling is the secret of Knowledge.” In terms of kabbalah, when the male and female unite, the *Shekhina* unites with God, the sacred images of the divine in each individual reproduce, participate in, and make possible the *tikkun ha-Shem*, the repair, the correction and the completion of the heavenly *hibour*. While God is mysteriously always perfect and complete in Himself, in human experience and history, this perfection becomes dependent on the covenanted union of mankind and the Godhead. Classical sources sometimes speak of an androgynous first human being, as one can see in Plato’s *Symposium*, but this androgyne is not taken as either the original model of God or as the normative state of social relations. Until the late eighteenth century, however, the distinction between the sexes was seen as variations on one basic form in the archetypal body. As the evolutionary scientist Stephen Jay Gould points out,

all incarnations could only occupy a station along a continuum of metaphysical advance. Needless to say, the usual form of maleness, by virtue of a greater quantity of vital heat, stood near the apex of this sequence, while the characteristic female form,

through relative weakness of the same generating forces, ranked far down on the ladder.³⁵

In this model, since the male and female bodies simply have different expressions of the same organs and stand at relatively higher or lower levels of the same human experience, there was no absolute distinction between the sexes, and husband and wife rejoined and complemented the archetypal unity in order to reproduce. In the new science of the modern period, however, the genders were more radically distinct, virtually two separate species, and thus no amount of social reform, individual education or personality development could make a woman equal to a man. This “radical diformism” was even more extreme than the sexist reading of the earlier model.³⁶ It could easily lead to the classification of the female as belonging to the same lower kind of being as savages, children and lunatics, that is, not fully human. The similarities of shape and function of female organs from then on could either be dismissed as mere optical illusions or evidence of an evolutionarily incomplete development.³⁷ Interestingly, the rabbinical and kabbalistic attitudes and discussions are at best implied to be of a piece with these two viewpoints, whereas the Talmudic and mystical arguments tend to argue along a different trajectory altogether.

In the *Galut*, Exile, Gold has become separated from His own Self or Shadow or Presence, the *Shekhina*, but they are reunited in the moment of human sexual congress properly performed—with love, care and focus on the Law—and on the Sabbath when the original perfection and unity is re-established, at which point the *Shekhina* embodies in herself the deity, the human couple, and the covenanted unity of God and Israel. The most remarkable aspect of this remythologized Judaism as conceived by the post-Maimonidean kabbalists is that when human beings transform themselves and their relationship to God, a metamorphosis occurs in the divine realm itself. This kind of transformation caused by shifts in the human condition and reshaping and revalorizing the realm of heavenly existence is called theurgy. It is not that the mysteriously unnamed God who has no attributes at all except the negative qualities explained by Maimonides—that God has no size to be measured, no extension in space, no endurance in time, nothing that can be perceived or imagined; but that the organization of the sacred that came into being in the split second when the world was created does change. It is in the *sepherotic* burst of energies out of the *Eyn-*

³⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, ‘The Birth of the Two-Sex World’, A review of Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) in *The New York Review of Books* (June 1994) p. 11.

³⁶ Gould, ‘The Birth of the Two-Sex World’, p. 12.

³⁷ Gould, ‘The Birth of the Two-Sex World’, p. 13.

Sof or infinite and totally other where it can be imagined figuratively as a series of expanding concentric spheres of almost pure divine force and in a sequence of differently conceived metaphoric structures and mythical narratives. This transformation of the Godhead into a plane of existential events is revealed in the way the male is circumcised, in the imagined conceit of the *hieros gamos*—the return of *Shekhina* from exile and her approach to her heavenly groom in the discursive terms of the *Canticle of Canticles*—in brief in “nature of the divine”³⁸ as human beings perceive, imagine, remember and express it.³⁹ The final sephira

³⁸ Wolfson, ‘Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation’, p. 202.

³⁹ Sometimes the interpretations are at once more complicated and at others more simple, even to the point of denying their own implications and stating misogynistic prejudices. In the section of the *Mishnah* dealing with fasting, for example, the verses of the *Shir ha-Shirim* (Canticles) are alluded to and reapplied: “Rabban Simeon b. Gamiel said: There were no happier days for Israel than the fifteenth of Ab and the Day of Atonement, for in them the daughters of Jerusalem used to go forth in white raiment and there were borrowed, that none should be abashed which had them not...” (*Taanai* 4:8); thus establishing the grounds for joy and purity in the preparations for Yom Kippur and the cleansing of the people’s collective soul at the start of the New Year through confession and ritual sacrifices in the Temple, the virgins of the people representing this condition of purity. The words of Simeon provide a positive context to the citation from the *Song of Solomon*. Then the discussion continues: “And the daughters of Jerusalem went forth to dance in the vineyards. And what did they say? ‘Young man, lift up thine eyes and see what thou wouldst choose for thyself: set not thine eyes on beauty, but set their eyes on family...’ The physicality and sensuality of the proof text begins to be transformed by the spiritualizing and moralization of the lesson drawn: the beauty is no longer to be the alluring charms of the sexual partner desired in the *Shir ha-Shirim*, for the youths are told to look not so much above and beyond the dancing girls and towards heaven itself but rather towards the responsibilities of domestic relationships of marriage and reproduction, the creation of a family. The context here comes from prophetic discourses in which Israel is imagined as the wife and mother of the Heavenly Father. Still further into this passage from *Taanai*: “Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him in the day of his espousals and in the day of the gladness of his heart: *In the day of his espousals*—this is the giving of the Law; and *in the day of the gladness of his heart*—this is the building of the Temple. May it be built speedily in our day.” Instead of the erotic ritual of spring couplings which forms the heart of the *Shir ha-Shirim*, the focus shifts to the royal return of the King from the beating of the bounds or purgation of annoying animals and trespassing nomadic tribes, and hence to the restoration of national political strength and social order, read now as rededication or re building of the destroyed cult centre and spiritual heart of Israel. This is less *Shlomo ha-Melech* as the *Sponsus* (groom) to the *Sponsa* (bride) of the representative priestess than the exaltation of Wisdom (*Hochmah*), idealized son of the heavenly mother, *Shekhina* and Emanation of the Divine. In the Rabbi Simeon of the

is *Shekhina* herself, the point at which the spiritual and material interface—literally come face to face—and the moment of creation described at the opening of Genesis begins, which is why Scriptures opens with an incomplete and grammatically broken verse. *Bereshit* does not translate as *In principio*, “In the beginning”. The word for at the beginning is *Bereshon*. Instead, the Hebrew Bible starts off inside the beginning, within the originating burst of the sacred energy or divine voice (*kol*) that opens into the vast nothingness of non-existence and creates the *tohu-bohu*, the shapeless and inconsistently seething mass, and this then becomes the language of words, the shaped letters of speech (*dibbur*) that can eventually be understood as intelligible. All this as the *ruach* (the energizing creative power) rests on the mass of newly created world-stuff in the marriage of heaven and earth, of the divine and the material, of the male extruded from the perfect dimension less heavenly androgyne on the female projection, presence and shadow that receives and gives form and substance to the self-exiled aspect of the divine.

Chapter III of the *Sacred Letter* is entitled “The Second Path: The Time of the Relationship”. By time is not meant a shared chronological time but rather an appropriate moment different for each individual. It is the sacred moment (*’onah*) when the drop of semen is ripe for sexual reproduction, a time created by the entire body of the man when his total intentions are focused on performance of his covenantal duty; it is also the time when the earthly experience has passed from the profane nature of the week to the brief entry into the eternal timelessness of the Sabbath; that is, when for both the individual and the historical collectivity who are part of the special relationship with God the conjunction of this world and the world-to-come is pure and clear. The author of the *Iggeret* divides this process of sacred union into three moments: (1) the cycle of time related to the passage of the day through the cosmic turning of the universe; (2) the cycle of time associated with nourishment of the body so that the white drop of blood, the fluid created in the body, is strong and healthy and full of creative potency; and the third cycle of time having to do with the hours

Zohar, a medieval recreation of talmudic wisdom in the mode of mystical romance, a different kind of interpretation is given to this Spiritual Bride, with the familiar verses of erotic praise spun out into a fantastic conceit: In the words of Rabbi Simeon, “Because she flowers in the Garden of Eden, the Community of Israel is called Rose of Sharon; because her desire is to be watered from the deep stream in which is the source of all spiritual rivers, she is called Lily of the Valley. Also because she is found at the deepest place, is she designated Lily of the Valley. At first she is a rose with yellowish petals, and then a lily of two colours, white and red, a lily of six petals, changing from one hue to another. She is named *rose* when she is about to join with the King, and after she has come together with him in her kisses, she is named *lily*.”

of the day, that is, with historical experience of time in orderly patterns of waking and sleeping, working and resting, performing social deeds and being alone with one's wife. Thus the external conditions, the social circumstances, and the physical being of the husband are in harmony with the sacred powers of the world and the eternal needs of heaven. When all these conditions and forces are in alignment, then, followed the words of Leviticus 12:2,

The woman's seed will be made in the image of the clay and when the man's white drop enters it, it will form into the image of the potter who created the world; and this is the secret of: "The woman will produce a seed and bring forth a male child."

In this mingling of the male and female seeds, the reproductive event, *zivoug*, the copulation, is not only a mythical narrative on the model of the Song of Songs, it is also the original intentions of the divine and the intellectual focusing of the human minds on the divine, and the place wherein the mystery of union occurs, inside the world of creation, *ha'olam ha-zeh* and throughout the spheres of heavenly reverberations where the voice of heaven is heard, the world that is always coming into being, *olam ha-bah*, and also the foetus produced ready to receive its soul and the consequences and implications of this new extension of the original act of creation.

Chapter IV then examines the third path, the notion of nourishment needed to ensure the production of this child who will carry Israel from one generation to another. Citing classical science—meaning Aristotle, but also the proverbial wisdom of the ancient world, as well as the medical writings of Galen—the writer of the Holy Letter says that an animal is what it eats, hence the nourishment determines the nature of the person that is conceived and born. Hence foods are chosen by the laws of *kashrut*, cooked in an appropriately clean and appetizing manner, and eaten in a comfortable and friendly social way. These meals, taken in moderation, make the husband and wife ready for their love-making, balancing out their humours (temperaments), strengthening them for the actual process of conception, and ensuring that the foetus has a healthy environment in which to develop.

Then in **Chapter V** the discussion is given over to the fourth path, that of intention. To a great extent, following the discovery of monotheism and the rejection of idolatry, the concept of intention becomes the hallmark of rabbinical Judaism: it is not the act in itself which is good or bad, sinful or blessed, but the intention which determines its value. This radical inward-turning of morality is explicated carefully here in regard to love, and to do so the importance of the imagination is stressed. By imagination, however, is not meant the post-Romantic notion of artistic creativity, but rather the faculty of the mind to engender images. Instead, the faculty, working through empathy, speculation

and wit breaks down normal distinctions and draws unexpected analogies.⁴⁰ The imagination works more than just at the individual level modern science considers, but in a collective, cumulative and critical way. For while in the development of Judaism out of ancient Middle Eastern cultures the sacred rhetoric tended both to delete any narratively coherent or consistent dependence on supernatural beings and events, either through virtually total deletion or fragmentation and dispersal through long stretches of text as allusive and intellectualized rhetoric or by internalization of reference points to transcendent divine zones of experience or, latterly, individual psychological activity, the presence always of idolatrous contextual cultures made it possible for deviant, heretical or popular thinking to return to the archaic materiality of the pre-Jewish images and myths. A few rare examples of ritual, architectural and institutional archaisms seem to remain in Scripture, for example, the descriptions of the Holy of Holies, including especially the careful depicting of the cherubim carved on the ark of the covenant.⁴¹ It was said of these two carved figures, that when Israel was living according to the Law the cherubim, one male, one female, faced each other and were entwined in the act of love, but when the nation turned away from God the faces of the cherubim also turned away from one another.⁴² In one sense, the figures of the two ancient creatures belongs to the old myths transformed into (reduced to) rhetorical language expressive of an allegory on the state of the nation; in another, the rabbinical speculations explore the collective psychology of Israel when there is no longer a Temple and the archaic furniture has been all but forgotten as having any substantial or visual qualities. In another sense,

⁴⁰ "Imagination," says the narrator of Mann's *Young Joseph*, "the art of divining the emotional life of others—in other words, sympathy—is not only commendable inasmuch as it breaks down the limitations of the ego, it is always an indispensable means of self-preservation," Mann, *Young Joseph*, p. 324.

⁴¹ M. Haran, 'The Ark and the Cherubim: Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual', *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 9, nos 1-2 (1959), pp. 89-94. This piece is the conclusion to an earlier article with the same title in *Israel Exploration Journal*, vol. 9, nos 1-2 (1959), pp. 30-38. Although lexical roots and iconographic similitudes can be found in surrounding ancient Middle Eastern cultures, the *cherub* remains elusive. Rather than survivals of previous belief systems and linguistic avatars, the figures in Scripture, like other pre-Jewish imagery and legend, have become condensed, highly allusive points of discussion. In some midrashim, the pair of *cherubim* flanking the entry to the Holy of Holies are seen as representative of male and female sexuality on a large variety of levels of mimetic experience. For the lexical background to cherub, see Alice Wood, "כְּרֻב" *Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Database*, Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge University (June 2006), at <http://www.div.ed.ac.uk/%20research/sahd/kwrb> Accessed 22/7/2012.

⁴² *Zohar*, vol. 2 §278a and BT *Baba Batra* 99a.

however, as *chacham* José Faur points out, there is not in ancient or rabbinical Judaism an aversion to the imagining of God in physical or visible terms.⁴³ As a mode of monolatry rather than monotheism, the ancient priests and Levites, as with the rabbinical sages, did not consider there to be only one unique God, but rather that the unutterable Name was above all others, these other divine beings worshipped by the nations having a secondary, dependent and reflective status. The Talmudic notion of *avoda zarah* referred less to the worship of foreign deities—something that would be inconceivable for a faithful Hebrew—than to improper worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that is, treating the Jewish God as though He were one among the pagan gods. Not only were not all images excluded from the Temple cult, but some were legitimate forms of iconolatry:

The figures of the Cherubim were embroidered in the curtains (Exod. 26:1; 36:8) and in the *pārokhet*, “veil” (Exod. 26:31; 36:35) of the Tabernacle and the Temple (2 Chron 3:14). They were also carved on the walls (1 Kings 7:29, 36) of the Temple....⁴⁴

The exact description of these cherubim in the Biblical text remains obscure, while the rabbinical attempt is an imaginative and poetic enhancement of the missing images.⁴⁵ On the one hand, then, there is room in Judaism to conceive and imagine that there were once valid visual and physical representations of the divine, with the reality of God not excluded from the created world, this universe of creation *olam ha-zeh* being a continuous emanation of God’s ineffable essence in the *olam ha-bah*, the world to come (with the future representing the past as well) into the physical real of our experience, that is, into history and nature. On the other hand, though that pictured reality of God has been lost from view, it remains a possibility of being recollected and reconstituted at some point, as it seems to have been in certain moments of national crisis. The verbal descriptions created by the rabbis—their *ekphrasis*—should not be considered idolatry, but a legitimate dependent reflex, a set of images that are ‘as if’ they were real, functioning in the same way as *aides de memoire* and focus points as the lost and forgotten visual, tangible experiences. These types of *ekphrasis* are filled with *enargeia*, with living, persuasive force.⁴⁶ In regard to the powerful verbal depictions of love-making between husband and wife and between God and the *Shekhina*, they are not merely figurative statements, allegorical conceits

⁴³ José Faur, ‘The Biblical Idea of Idolatry’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 69, no. 1 (1978), pp 1-15.

⁴⁴ Faur, ‘The Biblical Idea of Idolatry’, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Faur, ‘The Biblical Idea of Idolatry’, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Norman Simms, ‘*Fantasia, Enargeia*, and the Rabbinical Midrash: The Classical Way to Read Jewish Texts’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2009), pp. 10-24.

or heretical violations of the commandment against graven or molten images. They are also not iconic, in the sense of being meant to be seen through, optical channels or bridges between one level of mimetic experience and another; but are metonymic entities, that is, they are part of the whole, foretastes of what will later be experienced more fully.

Images seem to have become words, and words represent highly abstract, spiritualized concepts, at the same time as the energies of sexual desire and gratification still drive an intellectual search for lost moments when God was both visually accessible and, though extremely dangerous to see—to the point of death—defied the alien notion of an absolutely other heavenly realm that was the only eternal reality to be achieved. Perception, imagination, memory, expression and creative analysis remained a continuous and interwoven series of experiences that at once anchored Jewish physical and intellectual life in the essential materiality of the world and allowed it to participate in—and even to transform and perfect—the upper realms of the world to come.

This mythical and moralistic version of national sexuality in the copulating cherubim is radically distinct from classical and rhetorical notions of thinking in images as part of a complex system of memory activation,⁴⁷ wherein ideas are conceived as words and verbal statements condensed into mental pictures, with such mnemonic figures expanded and articulated during spoken performances, including the act of thinking. All such pagan and Christian formations of imagination are modes of idolatry, of embodying into describable and pronounceable shape that which lies beyond any limits of reason. The imagination intended here in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* is more mystical and intellectual, as the process by which the ineffable becomes material and historical through the intentions of love. If the human being is made in the image of God, that little picture is a *tselem*; not a mirrored projection of something that

⁴⁷ Though some scholars in the 1950s and beyond would still speak of these images as a frozen, inert residue in the text and try to explain their presence and significance by the persistence of unconscious memories embedded in the redactors of a multi-layered Holy Script, more insight can come from a writer like Thomas Mann in his composition of the biblical epic *Joseph and his Brothers* (1934-1944). Working from the anthropology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Mann creates a vision of ancient Hebrew society prior to Exodus that is enmeshed in surrounding mythical cultures and mentalities, with the rhetoric of the patriarchal figures of Judaism struggling to express themselves in a conceptual world of monotheistic experience. Cultic rituals and polytheistic spirits surround and interfere with the emergence of Jewish discourse. Ignorant, naïve and reactionary characters cling to the archaic figures of speech and ancient monumental features of the landscape against the innovative, reforming and purifying ideas of men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

can be seen or echoed into something that can be heard or pronounced as text. It is rather an image that represents in a new form, a new sound, and new medium the essence of creativity itself, the energy and spiritual force of heaven—itsself immeasurable and unimaginable—transformed into a foetus and thus developed into a person.

While the outer husk and material substance of the foetus is created by the sexual conjunction of male and female, the life and the soul are generated in the participation of the divine—God in the act of making love to the *Shekhina*. The allegory is too simple to leave on the level of saying that God places a soul into the materially generated body of the conceived child, as is implied as well, as we shall see, in Platonic thinking. Through the intention of the husband and wife to replicate the process of divine love—not to imitate a mythical copulation of godly father and goddess-like mother—but to call into the created universe the essence of the heavenly and eternal love-making, the forever-continuing creation of the world, is then to bring into being the child dedicated to fulfilment of the Law. Everything then proceeds on one level as though it were also occurring on the other, and the two processes interanimate one another, reinforce, enhance and perfect each other. Without the proper intention, the bodies in human love making cannot achieve this higher aim, and the product of their efforts does not share in the eternal bliss. Moreover, by performing the bodily acts of copulation, the bodies themselves transgress the presence of the divine which is thwarted by the failure, and God and His *Shekhina* are separated from one another, alienated in the *galut* or exile of a world not yet fully sanctified. The Beauty of the divine comes into being—into consciousness and into intelligence—when the intention is to know the other as an image of God and to know God as pure Intelligence. However, the illusion or delusion of beauty in the marriage partner that stimulates sexuality is a mere projection of libidinous desire for self-satisfaction.

In Himself and thus in the mysterious occlusion of His own eternal being, the God of the rabbis remains, of course, perfect and complete beyond time and space. God's presence in history, human experience, and in the material of the created world has thus been compromised. The sexual act and what stimulates it, then, have no proper significance, and are mere simulations of love, intelligence and pleasure; they are idols and thus who indulge are idolaters. Their procreative actions fall way short of the process by which to love is to know: a man and woman cannot know one another without love that is intended to involve God, and they cannot love God without knowing one another. Love is then merely an empty word, a husk without a spark of understanding, a vain sound to designate an action without any meaning. Intelligence is the spark of understanding, the intelligence of knowing one another in a creative act that

includes, that calls into being—that is, into the imaginative comprehension—the divine.

Chapter VI deals with the fifth path to fulfilment of the *mitzvot* associated with reproduction, the quality of the relationship between the bride and groom, and between the marital couple and God. Whereas other ancient peoples and religions may treat the organs of generation as unworthy of a pious husband and wife and the joining of these organs in the act of generation as below the dignity of God's sight or own enjoyment, the Jewish husband approaches his wife in modesty and respect because she is to be a sacred vessel in which the seed of life will be born and because what is to be done together in the act of love is not just performed for the sake of heaven, with the mind focused on the higher spiritual realm, but because when carried out with dignity, honour, respect and love the married couple's pleasurable experience brings God closer to His *Shekhina*, invites the participation of the heavenly couple in this human act of procreation, and enhances the entire universe with sanctity. The effective consummation of the sexual act as an act of sanctified procreation depends on the pleasure and respect each partner shows to the other, especially the husband on his first night with his virginal bride. From then on, her positive reception of his advances determine the value of their love-making.⁴⁸

For the husband to treat his wife with honour and love, he must approach her slowly, appeal to her with amorous words, reassuring her of both the pleasures and the spiritual meaning in what is to occur. The language of love used in Hebrew in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, woven together out of many passages of Scripture and Talmudic writings, indicates clearly that the same lexicon is shared by the descriptors for sexual copulation and intellectual conversation and dialogue. What is metaphoric in one kind of experience is literal in the other and *vice versa*.⁴⁹ The dance of love, *chor*, is like the slow and intricate stages by

⁴⁸ Idel, 'Métaphore et pratique', p. 7.

⁴⁹ "En outre, d'après les cabalistes, l'existence des syzygies dans le monde divin est une condition *sine qua non* de la réalisation de la balance qui assure l'existence de la structure divine. Aussi, la relation mâle femelle est présentée par eux comme une dynamique enveloppant la totalité, pénétrant le monde divin en entier. Le rapport sexuel humain est perçu alors comme une 'participation mystique' à la hiérogamie divine, à la fois en la reflétant et en influençant le processus divine," Idel, 'Métaphore et pratique', p. 9. Furthermore, according to the kabbalists, the existence of sexual pairs in the divine world is a condition *sine qua non* for the realization of the balance that assures the existence of the divine structure. As well, the male-female relation is presented by them as a dynamic enveloping the totality, penetrating into the entire divine world. The human sexual relationship is perceived then as a "mystical participation: into the divine *hieros gamos*, at once reflecting and influencing the divine process."

which rabbinical disputants parse difficult passages, encounter disagreements with the aim of reconciling logical impasses, and the penetration into the mysteries of holy text give extreme great joy to those who achieve this goal in discourse. The disputants and study-partners in in the *bays ha-kneset*, the house of assembly, where the learning takes place, treat each other with respect and love, even as they wrestle with each other and the knotty problems of the divine writings. The partners in learning seduce the meaning from the passages they are working their way through, and they seek in this way to do something more than smooth away rough patches or reach a single pure point of agreement; they engage in their emotional endeavour to draw forth as many meanings as possible, to produce a whole progeny of significations, and thus to keep open the debate into future generations. Like the beginning student with the more experienced, or the disciple with the master, the wife and the husband each contribute to the formation of the foetus, each their own seed to be mingled in the creation of sacred life. Thus the sixth chapter concludes the whole book with the statement

God in His Mercy, opens our eyes with the light of His Torah,
which makes us worthy of approaching Him by the secrets of His
Torah, and to engender children prepared to fear and serve Him.
Amen and Amen.⁵⁰

This way there are many revelations, discoveries and creative insights, not least between the husband and wife. They are uncovered to one another and thus can know one another, they interpenetrate each other's bodies, to be sure, sharing their seeds, but also their minds, complementing and completing each other's intellects and personalities, insofar as their sexual intercourse always involves the third intermediary and exalting presence of the divine. It is then that husband and wife become of one flesh, but that their individualities are enhanced as a couple and they conceive both a child in the mother's womb and in God's world but also a family and a continuing, expanding Israel—more than persons to fulfil the Law, more than a place in the world where peace and order may reign, more than endurance in history on order to continue *tikkun ha'olam* and sanctification of the Name, *Kiddush ha-Shem*.

2. Remez: New Secular Contexts and Counter-Texts for Better Understanding

The *Iggeret-ha-Kodesh* or *Letter of Sanctity* which sets forth the essential attitudes, within mystical paradigms, of Jewish marriage, also builds on the

⁵⁰ “Dieu dans Sa clémence dessillera nos yeux par l'éclairage de sa Torah, il nous fer mériter d'accéder à Lui par les secrets de Sa Torah, et d'engendrer des enfants prêts à le craindre et a le server. Amen et Amen,” *Iggeret*, p. 73.

principles laid down by Plato as ideals in his projected Republic.⁵¹ In a number of ways, because of its seeming harmony with non-Jewish traditions of love as a philosophical topic, the Letter could help explicate some aspects of romantic love developed during the Middle Ages, as in the lengthy discussions of Jean de Meung's section of *Le Roman de la Rose* or Chaucer's "Prologue of the Wyf of Bath" in *The Canterbury Tales*. It is particularly in the lengthy confessional and autobiographical speech of the Wyf of Bath that the rights of women, the natural and moral benefits of love-making and the cosmic significance of love itself are set forth as positive elements against the narrow-minded views of the clergy. Though Alyson's argument is a tissue of citations from earlier misogynist and anti-clerical satires, not least *The Romance of the Rose* but also the whole Ovidian tradition of ambiguous anti-female complaints, what is most intriguing is her tone—that is, that the poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, gives her a sprightly, witty and plausible rhetoric to make her case that her own experience as a woman trumps the misogynistic pseudo-logic of her ecclesiastical detractors. This fourteenth-century fictional female pilgrim is full of life, while the opposition, going back into classical antiquity, is often merely bilious and corrupt. Though I have argued that there is a good chance that Chaucer himself was born into a recently converted family and was certainly familiar with real Jews on the Continent, and therefore he may have read or at least been exposed to the attitudes encapsulated in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, the very existence of *The Wyf of Bath's Prologue* shows that at some point in late medieval history there was a leakage from the rabbinical culture into the Christian sensibility.⁵²

This rabbinical medieval guide to young newlyweds is as much a scientific manual on good sexual practice as it is a spiritual and social discussion of how important procreation is to the future and continuity of Israel. The male and female coming together to enjoy one another's bodies and to create a new life to enrich the community at the same time participate in the primary and ongoing creation of the world, imitating and enhancing the pleasures of God in his spiritual union with the *Shekhina*. More than Plato, the author of the *Iggeret* instructs the marital partners in the significance of copulation based on mutual respect, patience, sobriety, and honouring of God's presence as an assistant in their love. While it is the duty of the father to study and pray in the synagogue, as well as to ensure the formal education of his children, it is the honour of the

⁵¹ Plato, *The Laws*, Book Six, 'Correct Procreation', trans., Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986 [1970]), p. 255.

⁵² For discussion of Chaucer's knowledge of Judaism and his possible Jewish background, see Norman Simms, *A New Midrashic Reading of Geoffrey Chaucer: His Life and Works* (Lewiston, NY, Queenston, Ont. and Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

mother in the *Galut* (exile and dispersion, in which the Shekhina travels with the People of Israel throughout history) and in the days when there is no longer a Temple in Jerusalem to carry on the priestly cult of sacrifices on behalf of Israel to perform the *mitzvot* (sacred obligations) of child-care, informal education, family hygiene, and domestic orderliness and peace in the home—as though what she did were equivalent to what the High Priest did at the altar and in the Holy of Holies.

But another secular context that acts as a radical counter-text to the rabbinical text and its traditions can be found in the novel by Emile Zola, as pointed out earlier. Filled as it is with unlikeable characters, each in their own way guilty of some crime or anti-social behavior, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1866) nevertheless provides a set of concepts and a potent lexicon for describing what happens during the processes of love-making, not only physically considered in sexual intercourse but also psychologically, morally and socially as the generation of new human relationships.⁵³ Like the title character and her lover Laurent, the lovers in the modern post-religious world endure a prolonged period of strain, as the energies of their passion push against the established conventions and legal constraints of society. Thus the murder of Thérèse Raquin's husband Camille initiates their brooding that develops into a morbid obsession with their own guilt and a frightening need for one another. It is the kind of mortifying "moral" affliction, in the terms of nineteenth-century psychology based on the strength or weakness of nerves and that equates to a large degree with our own way of describing mental events in terms of emotional stresses and strains, which sensitizes the affective and cognitive faculties of lovers. Zola speaks of Thérèse and Laurent as entering into a "terrible communion of their guilty hearts." For the married Jewish couple conceived of in the *Iggeret* is also 'terrible' to the extent that the naïve couple first enter into a relationship that makes them anxious and frightened of their new life together and then, as they come to respect and honour one another through mutual care and through awareness of the presence of the divine third party they conjure forth through focus and devotion, the intense passion in Zola's novel lacks restraints and supports outside of the uncontrollable passion itself. This is terror in the classical Latin sense of a disorientating horror, a crisis of epistemological proportions—such as one can read in Virgil in regard to Aeneas and Dido when their love is interfered with by the fatal requirement to desist and separate, their union being contrary to the historical destiny of Rome and established through the deceit of Minerva and Juno. In the novel, Laurent goes to the city morgue in Paris, identifies the bloated

⁵³ This discussion of Zola's novel is extended in Norman Simms, *Alfred and Lucie Dreyfus in the Phantasmagoria* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013).

and rotting corpse of Camille, and reports back to Thérèse confirmation of the murder they have committed together, he by actually drowning his rival and she by inspiring him to the crime: “With eyes dilated in horror, Laurent conveyed all his terror to Thérèse, who, almost at her wits’ end, made a superhuman effort to speak.”⁵⁴

In this highly excited state of mental anguish, Zola’s two guilty lovers find themselves sharing something quite other than the pleasurable and exciting sexual tensions they had previously experienced and the mutual drive to annihilate the person who stood between their full consummation as husband and wife. They begin to communicate on a new level in a mutually shared psychological crisis. This new form of intercourse certainly still has dimensions of touch and speech, but it is no longer one of amorous love, certainly not romantic or domestic, even though they will eventually marry and come to depend on one another in a grotesque parody of married life, fooling for a lengthy period both the elderly Madam Raquin, Camille’s mother, who blesses their union and the old friends who mistake the signs of the couple’s closeness as something other than it really is, a fear of intimacy because that intimacy would open the portals to the living hell they have created for and in one another, the intrusive ghost of Camille that lies between them in bed. The “love” between Thérèse and Laurent is conducted by what Zola terms an “uncanny telepathy.”

The *uncanny* is a term which has taken on extra meanings in its Freudian usage, the *unheimlich*, translated by modern commentators in French as “l’inquiétante étrangeté.”⁵⁵ This disquieting strangeness of the *uncanny* or mysterious and bizarre seems to negate the sense of the canny, being cautious, wary and shrewd, based on the Scottish dialectal version of knowledge and knowingness; yet the uncanny goes further into a way of seeing, feeling and knowing what is outside the normal bounds of both common sense and logic. Freud’s German absolute adjective *unheimliche* takes on a more specialized sense, from the literal lack of homeliness or familiarity, to designate an awareness of something strange within the appearance of the ordinary, a disturbing presentiment of the dangerous or insecure under the cloak of normality. This sense of the frightening revelation during a usually day-to-day experience gives the term a value of importance to the psychoanalyst seeking to understand the behaviour of a person suddenly unable to function in his or her normal environment. The term *telepathy* was coined in 1882 by F.W. Meyers,

⁵⁴ Emile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6626/6626-h/6626-h.htm>. Accessed 21/9/2013.

⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, “L’inquiétante étrangeté”, translation of *Das Unheimliche* (1919) in *L’inquiétante étrangeté et autres essais*, trans Bertrand Féron (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) pp. 211-263.

apparently on the model of *telephony*, to express the communication of feelings or thoughts across a distance. It is a word belonging to the spiritualist movement, along with descriptions of ghost-like voices, images and activities, the so-called paranormal—that is, a dimension of human experience that transforms ordinary things by making them susceptible to extraordinary powers—spirits from beyond the grave, knowledge of secrets released from the past or the future, and occult processes of evoking and manipulating these events.

Whereas Zola's fictional characters find themselves sharing nightmares, waking visions, and disturbing, usually unstated feelings of guilt and mutual antipathy, the Jewish couple imagined by the *Iggeret* generate a new dimension to their relationship wherein they share feelings of mutual support and loyalty, develop and inhabit images and verbal patterns as manifestations of mental states they need not articulate clearly or at all, and find an ethical model of Jewish love that is different from and transcends both the romantic paradigm to be found in novels and poetry of the period and swerves from the Christian ideals encountered in popular love songs, ordinary secular conversations and allusions to biblical characters and events.

With many more chapters than the twentieth-century paraphrase of the novel cited to above, the Vezetelly version⁵⁶ follows Zola's original in showing in excruciating detail the psychological torments experienced by the two guilty lovers as they realize that the murder of Camille does not bring them any of the expected pleasures, domestic or sensual, they hoped to achieve through his drowning. Instead, day by day, but especially night by night, they find themselves put further into a state of terror and mutual hatred. The terror is manifest first in the apparition of the bloody, putrefying corpse of Thérèse's first husband, actually seen by Laurent in the morgue, but projected with such intensity by his agitated mind that Thérèse also senses its intrusive presence between them; it is later manifest in the person of Madame Raquin who suffers a stroke, with paralysis almost complete, leaving her as a conscious mind in a virtually dead body, and thus another vision of horror; but a horror neither of the lovers can bear to live without, as her absence will mean they have to look at each other and engage physically with the disgusting beings they have transformed themselves into. Zola plunges fully into the lexicon and iconography of Gothic spectral traditions, but makes the traditional terms evident in eighteenth-century authors now more painful to read because of the

⁵⁶ Although the translator explains that he had to soften some of the implications and language of the original French in order to have the novel pass through the stringent censorship of late Victorian times in England at the end of the nineteenth century, his version nonetheless comes closer to the intentions of the author than does the paraphrase.

new psychological realism of his own century. Note in the paragraph below how the couple both feel a visceral need to come together as a means of protecting themselves from the ghastly corpse that comes into their bed and their even more vivid repulsion from one another as their physiological agitation disturbs their mental states through mutual reactions. I will italicize the key phrases to be discussed below:

The following nights proved still *more cruel*. The murderers had wished to pass this part of the twenty-four hours together, so as to be able to defend themselves against the drowned man, and by a *strange effect*, since they had been doing so, they *shuddered* the more. They were *exasperated*, and their *nerves so irritated*, that they underwent *atrocious attacks of suffering and terror*, at the *exchange* of simple word or look. At the slightest *conversation* between them, at the least talk, they began *raving*, and were *ready to draw blood*.⁵⁷

There are four main categories of language here. To begin with, there is a code of abstract, and vague terms that draw on an imaginary effort and rely on generic categories of Gothic thought; such expressions as “more cruel”, “strange effect” and “atrocious attacks” are without substance and cannot be described in physical terms. The second category contains more physical or physiological descriptions and could be imagined as acted on the stage or painted in a picture: words such as “shuddered” and “raving” stand out in this passage. A third class of description, however, also sets the stage for the transformations that will become more explicit as the interactive pressures rise and the couple create between them experiences that are beyond the normal psychology of individual minds. The lovers also are seen to be in conversation, exchanging words, feelings and deeper forces of mutual interaction. Lastly, the expressions “exasperated” and “irritated” move into that other plane of experience which is ambiguously metaphorical, physical and psychological, in that they relate to attitudes of social relationship, organic stimulations of the nervous and sanguinary systems, and joint sensations of unconscious horror.

On their own, each of the pair of lovers senses the physical disgust at what they have done and what this murder has created between them. Hence the next paragraph following indicates this merely Gothic event:

The sort of remorse Laurent experienced was purely physical. His body, his irritated nerves and trembling frame alone were afraid of the drowned man. His conscience was for nothing in his terror. He did not feel the least regret for having killed Camille. When he was calm, when the spectre did not happen to be there, he would have

⁵⁷ This is the opening paragraph of Chapter XII.

committed the murder over again, had he thought his interests required it.

In such a description, the irritation of nerves and the shuddering of his frame only hint at the connections Zola sees between physical and psychological states, and do not yet disclose evidence of the mutuality of mental contacts—the telepathic relationship that creates uncanny experiences. When Zola speaks of “nervous attacks” a little later, the terminology requires a context of nineteenth-century medical science. The very word *nerve* does not yet have the very specific sense our own neurological studies have developed. That is, the term still has not disengaged fully from the general sense of tendon and vessel to form a separate organic system from blood vessels and musculature nor is there yet a full distinction between hormonal stimulants and emotional states of being. The electro-chemical nature of nervous energy was not yet brought out nor the psychological functioning of affective behaviour. Nerves seem to carry within themselves the terror, horror and disgust that the characters in the novel feel to be sweeping them along into thoughts and actions beyond their conscious control. The nerves also seem dependent on the organic environment of each person and, as they are weakened (enervated) or stimulated (irritated), fall prey to disruptive forces that then course through the body via the nerve tubes. In this paragraph, still within the same chapter, Zola begins to show the move from physical disgust at proximity of bodies towards an inner sensation of mutual strangeness:

When overcome with fatigue, they slept for an hour or two in the armchairs, to awaken with a start, under the influence of the sinister denouement of some nightmare. On awakening, with limbs stiff and tired, shivering all over with discomfort and cold, their faces marbled with livid blotches, they contemplated one another in bewilderment astonished to see themselves there. And they displayed strange bashfulness towards each other, ashamed at showing their disgust and terror.

Sexuality indeed is at work here, drawing the couple back to one another for physical closeness but repulsed by their relationship enough to prevent consummation of the coital act, and their awakening to the disgust in each other’s general appearance and physiognomy indicates the changes occurring in the parts of their mind they are starting to share in a strange and uncanny way. The “common terror” is irritated by the repeated experience of “nervous attacks”, with the consequence being a weakening of the body of each to resist the psychological power of the guilt travelling through their emotional system. Fatigue and enervation reinforce one another. These physiological (sexual) and psychological (moral) factors have become detached completely from the religious paradigms they once were contained in, and especially the Judeo-

Christian system of ethics, in which, for all its Jewish specificity, the *Iggeret* fits. By seeing how the creative and generative forces let loose can create havoc in individual and communal systems, it is possible to understand more fully the object of instruction in the Sacred Letter as it guides the young bride and groom into the *mitzvot* of marriage.

In Zola's novel, this mutuality of mind begins in the wake of the frustrated coital desires when the body they both touch and recoil in horror from is manifest as the visionary corpse of Camille.

They were seized with fever and delirium, and this obstacle, in their minds, became material. They touched the corpse, they saw it spread out, like a greenish and dissolved shred of something, and they inhaled the infectious odour of this lump of human putrefaction. All their senses were in a state of hallucination, conveying intolerable acuteness to their sensations.

How the "obstacle" in their mind "became material" is not explained by Zola, but what it seemed to be—a slimy green jelly of protoplasm—receives generic rhetorical colours. However, it is precisely this mental operation that we wish to understand, or at least to understand how nineteenth-century thinkers—scientists and novelists—conceived of this process. What exactly did *hallucination* mean in France in the second half of the nineteenth century? Where did it direct the new psychoanalytic methods developed in the following century?

In the novel being examined, Zola seems to describe hallucination in personified terms: "When an hallucination brought the countenance of the drowned man before Therese, she closed her eyes, keeping her terror to herself..." The manifestation of unconscious visualizing performs the action on its own, finding little or no resistance in the host body. However, this specific hallucinatory experience is not able to maintain its autonomy, since "...it was just the same with Laurent..." The hallucination rising in his mind causes him to blame and berate Thérèse, thus further agitating her constitution or temperament: "When driven to extremities, he, in a fit of despair, accused Therese of being afraid of Camille. The name, uttered aloud, occasioned additional anguish..." By Chapter XXIII, the couple have so influenced one another that they enter fully into a grotesque sexual embrace to try to ward off the power of the ghostly apparition they have conjured up in their shared hallucination:

And they clasped one another in a hideous embrace. Pain and horror took the place of love. When their limbs touched, it was like falling on live coal. They uttered a cry, pressing still closer together, so as not to leave room for the drowned man. But they still felt the shreds of Camille, which were ignobly squeezed between them, freezing their skins in parts, whilst in other they were burning hot.

It is difficult to disentangle the physical from the psychical aspects of this description. The only figurative language discernible is the simile of the live coal. In the tangled web of their love-making, Thérèse and Laurent share and generate the hallucinations that keep them in a continuously agitated state of nervous exhaustion:

While exchanging these ghastly embraces, they were a prey to the most terrible hallucinations, imagining that the drowned man was dragging them by the heels, and violently jerking the bedstead.

Try as they will to escape from the clutches of the corrupted corpse that glues them together in this ecstasy of fear and pain, they only exacerbate their living nightmare. They are, of course, at the same time becoming more and more sexually aroused and moving towards the orgasmic release. The trouble with reading this text persists in its reliance on vague and abstract terminology, as indicated by the italics added here:

At several intervals, they attempted in this way to overcome their *disgust*, by tiring, by wearing out their nerves. And each time their nerves became irritated and strained, causing them such *exasperation*, that they would perhaps have died of *enervation* had they remained in the arms of one another. This battle against their own bodies excited them to *madness*, and they obstinately sought to gain the victory. Finally, *a more acute crisis* exhausted them. They received *a shock* of such incredible violence that they thought they were about to have a fit.⁵⁸

Climax achieved, the two bodies separate, fall back in exhaustion, and yet find instead of pleasure further horror in their achievement:

Cast back one on each side of the bed, burning and bruised, they began to sob. And amidst their tears, they seemed to hear the triumphant laughter of the drowned man, who again slid, chuckling, under the sheet. They had been unable to drive him from the bed and were vanquished.

⁵⁸ Norbert Col made a suggestion that is worth considering: “ ‘Enervation’ would have meant that the nerves had been drawn out, that the body was nerveless—in any case this was the meaning in the nineteenth century, as observable in Tocqueville, though only the adjective ‘énerve’ seems to have existed (I cannot recall any use of ‘énervation,’ though I may be wrong)”, personal communication, 20 June 2012. The problem may lie in the fact that this paraphrase/translation from the 1950s may not reflect accurately what Zola wrote and what medical terminology was current a century earlier. I am working backwards, as it were, from the paraphrase to a purportedly more accurate translation and finally to the original French text, in other words, peeling back the skin of current psychological assumptions to a more distant and unfamiliar concept of how the mind works; a gradual descent into the *unheimlich*.

In the next chapter, Zola shows how the life, and especially the love-making of the couple, continues in this way, increasing the despondency and the desperation to find a way out of their mutual madness. “Each day, the sensations of the couple were practically the same.” The ambiguity here renders the meaning as both that they went through the same routine of day time repose in work—day chores and socializing and night time hallucinations bound into their sexual activity and that the couple experienced the very same sensations of desire and dread and the uncanny visualizations they felt as coming to them from the outside, in the person of the dead Camille, and driving them ever further into insanity.

These parts of the process of love in terms of nervous energies and disposition can better be observed in the French original of *Thérèse Raquin*. Those descriptions are of a depth-psychology verging on psychohistorical insights into trance-states of mutual hallucination; they come close to the new ideas developed in the 1890s dealing both with the unconscious of individuals and the group-experiences of crowds. As Freud explores the nature of the layers of unconscious and subconscious in the mind, he comes upon facets of memory impressed in the first trauma of infancy and later disturbances that have to be distorted in order to be accommodated to the architecture of personality the child constructs for herself as she becomes independent in the world. The thinkers who deal with how social entities consolidate large numbers of individual minds into group behaviour and perceptions begin to question the forces of imitation and suggestion, glimpsing archaic patterns of pre-rational thought in virtually biological terms, and yet often analysing the origins of language and imaginings within extra-individual activities. Consciousness thus may be considered to emerge from unconsciousness in such group phenomena as choral dances, spiritual descents into labyrinthine caves, and violent rituals such as hunting, warfare and infanticide. This way of looking at the anthropology and psychology of the late nineteenth century brings us back to the discussion of the disquieting strangeness that is translated as uncanny or *unheimlich*, but which also appears in a more Jewish context as the disturbance between the image of God projected into the self of each created human being and the distortions of that *tselem* (the image of God in mankind) when truth and justice are denied or mocked.⁵⁹

Zola's Chapter XXII opens in almost the exact terms the Vezetelly translation rendered it, with use of expressions such as “[i]ls exaspéraient, ils irritaient leurs nerfs, ils subissaient des crises atroces de souffrance et de terreur”

⁵⁹ In the French original of the novel, unlike Vezetelly's 1905 translation into English, the stress falls on the *temperament* of the various characters, with the terminology of nervous disorders less emphatic. It will be evident that this is what the novelist believed he was doing when he wrote the Preface for the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin*.

But there then follow significant differences. The English version tells us that “they began raving, and were ready to draw blood,” whereas the French describes the process in these terms: “ils voyaient rouge, ils déliraient”, literally “they saw red, they became delirious.” The metaphoric idiom of seeing red may be acceptably translated in terms of raving, but the use of the term *déléraient* suggests something different than being ready to draw blood or act with violent intent. Delirium by the late nineteenth century was clearly a medical term, one associated with hallucinations, and used as a verb, and a plural at that, makes the passage an important preliminary to the coming descriptions of mutually-induced states of madness. The language of the translation veers even further from what Zola seems to have intended when it turns the French version’s diagnostic language of temperaments into more naturalistic descriptions of the “icy perspiration” on Laurent’s skin and Thérèse “shuddering” in response to his presence and the early onset of the ghostly body of Camille. The original says,

*La nature sèche et nerveuse de Thérèse avait agi d’une façon bizarre sur la nature épaisse et sanguine de Laurent. Jadis, aux jours de passion, leur différence de tempérament avait fait de cet homme et de cette femme un couple puissamment lié, en établissant entre eux une sorte d’équilibre, en complétant pour ainsi dire leur organisme. L’amant donnait de son sang, l’amante de ses nerfs, et ils vivaient l’un dans l’autre, ayant besoin de leurs baisers pour régulariser le mécanisme de leur être.*⁶⁰

Thérèse’s dry and nervous nature had acted in a bizarre manner on the thick and bloody nature of Laurent. Already, earlier on during the days of their passion, their difference in temperament had made of this man and this woman a powerfully allied couple,

⁶⁰ Compare the novelist’s description with the following remarks on Jewish sexual mystogogy by Charles Mopsik, “Car l’homme comme image ou reflet de la plénitude divine est à la fois mâle et femelle, pôles unis en haut, mais séparés ici-bas, unité que seul le couple humain reconstitue. Une fois mariés, l’homme et la femme se conjuguent afin de former une unité qui est à la fois la reconstitution de l’unité de la plénitude divine et un individu singulier. Engendrer un corps et y permettre la venue d’une âme doit être vécu comme un acte d’engagement total vis-à-vis de l’histoire du salut, car c’est faire œuvre liturgique en faveur du Messie” (For man as the image or reflection of divine plenitude is at once male and female, poles united above, but separated here below, a unity which the human couple alone reconstitutes. Once married, the man and the woman join together finally to form a unity which is at the same time the reconstitution of the unity of divine plenitude and a single individual. To engender a body and thereby to allow the coming of a soul that must be lived in an act of total engagement face to face with the history of salvation, for it is a liturgical work in favour of the Messiah, *Lettre sur la sainteté*, “Présentation”, p. 10).

establishing between them a sort of equilibrium, completing so to speak their organism. The male lover gave his blood, the enamoured her nerves, and they lived within one another, having need of their kisses to regulate the mechanism of their being.

This entire passage—the whole paragraph—has not been taken into Vezetelly's translation, consequently changing the nature of the psychological perspective Zola uses to describe the events that follow. Zola begins by turning upside down the traditional physiology of humours medicine set forth by Hippocrates and Galen and developed over many centuries in the Middle Ages and Renaissance:⁶¹ that men and women differ in their temperament, that is, in their balance of the four bodily fluids—blood, melancholy, choler and jaundice—creating a paradigm of the male being moist and solid, the female dry and agitated. In love, the man and the woman balance each other out, complementing the nature of the one with that of the other, and achieving through their sexual embraces a body in equilibrium. However, this steady-state in sexual relations becomes unbalanced by an intrusive force and event.

Mais un détraquement venait de se produire: les nerfs surexcités de Thérèse avaient dominé. Laurent s'était trouvé tout d'un coup jeté en plein éréthisme nerveux; sous l'influence ardente de la jeune femme, son tempérament était devenu peu à peu celui d'une fille secouée par une névrose aiguë.

But a breakdown began to make itself felt: Thérèse's overly-excited nerves dominated. Laurent suddenly found himself thrown

⁶¹ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, sect 1, subsection 3: "A humour is a liquid or fluent part of the body, comprehended in it, for the preservation of it; and it is either innate or born with us, or adventitious and acquisite" (p. 128). "*Blood* is a hot, sweet, temperate, red humour, prepared in the *meseraick* veins, and made of the most temperate parts of the *chylus* in the liver, whose office is to nourish the whole body, to give it strength and colour, being dispersed by the veins thought every part of it..." (pp. 128-129). "*Pituïta*, or phlegm, is a cold and moist humour, begotten of the colder parts of the *chylus* (or white juice coming out of the meat digested in the stomach) in the liver; his office is to nourish and moisten the members of the body, which, as the tongue, are moved, that they be not over dry" (p. 129). "*Choler* is hot and dry, bitter, begotten of the hotter parts of the *chylus*, and gathered to the gall: it helps the natural heat and senses, and serves to the expelling of excrements" (p. 129). "*Melancholy*, cold and dry, thick and black, and sour, begotten of the more fæculent part of nourishment, and purged from the spleen, is a bridle to the other two hot humours, *blood* and *choler*, preserving them in the blood, and nourishing the bones" (p. 129). This version of *The Anatomy* is based on the 1650 edition with the Latin completely given in translation and embodied in an all-English text, edited by Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Tudor Publishing, 1954).

into a violent state of nervous irritability; under the burning influence of the young woman, his temperament became little by little like that of a girl shaken by an acute nervous attack.

In their intimacy invaded by the guilt shared for the murder of Camille, which Vezetelly alludes to in his expression “common terror,” suddenly the sanguine qualities of Thérèse’s temperament throw the balance out of kilter in Laurent and therefore in the shared organism of their love. *Erethism* is an eighteenth-century medical term to designate extreme irritability in an organ, usually the heart. Here it leads to a kind of sex-change in the lover’s physiology. For Zola, this process of psycho-physical transformation lies at the heart of the events he makes the plot of the novel turn on. He seems interested in the process itself,

Il serait curieux d’étudier les changements qui se produisent parfois dans certains organismes, à la suite de circonstances déterminées. Ces changements, qui partent de la chair, ne tardent pas à se communiquer au cerveau, à tout l’individu.

It would be most interesting to study the changes that are thus produced sometimes in certain organisms following determined circumstances. These changes starting from the flesh are not in slow in communicating themselves into the brain and then throughout each individual.

There are two kinds of interactive processes at work here. On the one hand, the communication of stimulating impulses (*chatouillements*, excitement, tickling, titillation) from physical sensations from the blood through the nerves and into the moral aspects of the mind; and on the other, much more ingenious and mysterious—if not mystical—from one personality to another, from a male dominated by one temperament to a female by another. The voluptuous desires and the physical embraces (*baisers* as both kisses and eventually intercourse) involve thus more than the exchange of bodily fluids, but also humours, and also the transformation of temperaments. Such a knotted process generates the hallucinations these two lovers experience in the extremity of their passion, an engendering of sterility, to the point where they themselves become ghastly apparitions of their own soul-destroying fears and self-hatred. Whereas the crimes begin with almost inadvertent confidences of their desire to rid themselves with the annoying presence of Thérèse’s first husband Camille, those confidences manifested in the wife’s voicing of the vague wish and later somewhat less ephemeral assent to the murder by drowning, and Laurent’s misreading of the woman’s words as less subjunctive than commanding desire and subsequent approval of his actions, this later stage in their social-sexual intercourse turns against the paralyzed mother-in-law whose lumpish and silent body both comes between them and threatens to disappear forcing them to once again confront the original guilt. Even more ingeniously—in the sense of a

metaphysical conceit fraught with inversions and ironic displacements—they repeat the crime by speaking out their guilt to the elderly Madame Raquin to make her suffer a near soul-death within her useless body, thus conceiving of the triply horrendous hallucination-image of themselves, each and conjointly, as a corpse drowned in their own iniquity. Fantastic as this rhetoric may be, for Zola it serves to reveal the inner workings of moral degradation, nervous degeneration through enervation and moral exhaustion, manifest in acts of mutual rape and bloody violation of the essential boundaries between one soul and another.⁶² The

⁶² “*Nerves*, or sinews, are membranes without, and full of marrow within; they proceed from the brain, and carry the animal spirits for sense and motion. Of these some be harder, some softer; the softer serve the senses, and there be 7 pair of them. The first be the optick *nerves*, by which we see; the second move the eyes; the third pair serve for the tongue to taste; the fourth pair for the taste in the palate; the fifth belong to the ears; the sixth pair is most ample, and runs almost over the bowels; the seventh pair moves the tongue. The harder sinews serve for the motion of the inner parts, proceeding from the marrow in the back, of whom there be thirty combinations, seven of the neck, twelve of the breast, &c.,” Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part I, Section 1, Subsection 3) p. 130. Although this mechanistic physiology was out of date by the mid-nineteenth century, it was, first of all, not completely discarded and persisted in a modified way until the start of the twentieth when the electro-chemical paradigm took over; and second of all, remained embedded in the language for a great number of figurative uses. The somewhat to our ears curious terms should not divert us from recognizing legitimate scientific concepts, albeit much modified in our time: for example, animal spirits can be understood as life force or animated currents of life-giving energy. Cp. This description of the phenomenon in the seventeenth century: “Ces fluids subtils, émis par le cerveau et s’écoulant par les nerfs, assimilés à des tubes, provqueraient un gonflement des muscles, entraînant ainsi la contraction musculaire” (These subtle fluids secreted by the brain and flowing through the nerves, are assimilated through tubes, stimulating an expansion of the muscles, and thus cause muscular contraction). The two modern historians of science who authored these words, explaining the advances of Galvani, Volta and Ampère, point out that over the next two centuries the basic paradigm of animal spirits is reinterpreted by research into the chemical and electrical processes in causing these phenomena. Charles Blondel and Bertrand Wolff, ‘Parcours pédagogiques: Des grenouilles de Galvani à la pile de Volta’, at <http://www.ampere.cnrs.fr/parcourspedagogique/zoom/galvanivolta/grenouilles/index>. Accessed 20/5/2012. The metaphor of a flowing river to describe a current of electricity or the image of spirits being rushed through the tubes of the body as a way of envisioning the various kinds of fluids carried in nerves, blood vessels and hormonal channels should be perfectly clear. Zola stands between a more modern objective lexicon of clinical reports and the more picturesque language of the previous centuries. See here also Blondel and Wolff on the clarifications made by Emil Dubois-Reymond (1818-1896) as he begins to adjust the older paradigm to the contemporary advances in science, and which is likely one source for Zola’s knowledge.

author comes close to making this involved procedure explicit when he says, in Chapter XXIV, “Ce fut vers cette époque que la vie des époux se dédoublait en quelque sorte” (It was at around this period that the life of these spouses doubled itself in some sort of a way). The nature of the doubling is actually a tripling of their love-hate life-death consciousness-unconsciousness: “Chaque jour, les sensations des époux étaient à peu près les mêmes” (Each day the sensations of the spouses were little by little the same). This is the old mystery of twinning, wherein what is produced may be taken as $1 + 1 = 2$ (two separate entities), $1 + 1 = 1$ (one entity repeated but the same each time), or $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 2$ (one entity appearing twice each time as half of itself), with twinning meaning both splitting into two and doubling of one into two. Thus Laurent and Thérèse “vivaient deux vies...seul à seule” (lived two lives...each alone and apart) in their anguish and also led a “double existence” (doubled or twin existence) of conjoint torture and hallucination. All of this seems to be, from one perspective, “dans un monde surnaturel” (in a supernatural world, a world of figurative imagination), while from another it is the world of inner mental mutuality.⁶³

Before we attempt to draw out the implications for this kind of describing two separate human beings caught up in a situation that tries the essential qualities of their individuality and moral strength to survive a crisis of their own construction, in order to see how it facilitates our understanding of the special communications created by men and women following the practical instructions given by the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, we need to return to our close analysis of Zola’s novel. And to do that more efficiently and thoroughly, it is necessary to examine two related documents or suites of texts. On the one hand, most related to *Thérèse Raquin* is the Preface the author penned for the second edition and then deleted from subsequent printings of his book, a set of introductory remarks on what he understands himself by the *temperament* of persons and the place his main characters fulfil in regard to the traditional psychology of Galenic medicine.⁶⁴ The second set of documents begins with George Sand’s long,

⁶³ Israel Chait points out that “Mankind was destined to be ensnared by fantasy and his energies would from then on be guided by the imagination. It would seek its initial gratification from the world of the physical. Thus, down through the generations, to our present time, whenever man sins and is overwhelmed by the desires of the instinctual, he too moulds his soul. He becomes drawn to and affected by the trappings of physical pleasures, his imagination overwhelms him, and as a result, distances himself from G-d. After the sin, man’s only hope for salvation is to rechannel his energies,” Chait, *Philosophy of Torah*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ Emile Zola, ‘Préface de la deuxième édition’, *Thérèse Raquin* (Paris: Librairie internationale, 1868) pp. i-ix, at

rambling and mixed *Promenades autour d'un village*, a continuation, as it were, of her discussions and descriptions of *orblutes* as overwhelming states or hallucinatory experiences, and then the essays, conversations and other sources she adduces for this psychology of rural peoples—or the heart of primitive humans still throbbing under nineteenth-century European civilization.

Zola undertook the 'Preface' to the novel reluctantly because of the unjustified and malicious attacks on him as a person and on *Thérèse Raquin* as a deliberately written piece of pornography. The author reacts with perhaps feigned surprise and pleads his own innocence of any of the charges brought against him, charging, in his turn, the reviewers with wilful blindness and ignorance. The modesty *topos*, traditional in such instances, perhaps masks more than the supposed sense of being misrepresented, and certainly leads to Zola overstating his objectivity and purely scientific concerns. His purpose in writing this novel was to study temperaments and not characters, choosing his persons as exemplary figures of nervousness and sanguinity, their lives being thus deprived of free will or, as we might call it, conscious determination. Each chapter in *Thérèse Raquin* shows a stage or chain in the logical progress of degeneration in the moral relationship between them. Physiology and psychology lock into one another, their horrified and horrifying responses to these incidents indicating in themselves, "un simple désordre organique, et une rébellion du système nerveux tendu à se rompre. L'âme est parfaitement absente" (a purely organic disorder, and a revolt of the nervous system tightened until it breaks. The soul is completely absent). In this way, Zola writes to a scientific goal ("un but scientifique") in order to analyse the mechanics of the human organism ("à l'analyse du mécanisme humain"). Thus questions of morality versus immorality become irrelevant. This is the modern method: to investigate the temperament of men and women "et des modifications profondes de l'organisme sous la pression des milieux et des circonstances" (and the deep modifications in the organic being under the pressure of environment and circumstances)—this looking forward to the kind of analysis Freud would call depth psychology or psychoanalysis. Hence, he proudly proclaims his membership in the school of naturalist writers. However, as we have tried to show, *Thérèse Raquin* is more and other than this simplistic *apologia* suggests, insofar as it goes beyond simple personification of types of humours characters (to use Ben Jonson's seventeenth-century expression),⁶⁵ and rather to adumbrate

http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Thérèse_Raquin/Préface_de_la_deuxième_édition.

Accessed 25/6/2012.

⁶⁵ Ben Jonson, *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*, at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5333/5333-h/5333-h.htm>. Accessed 21/6/2012. The

to some extent the research into crowd behaviour and mass personality developed at the turn of the century. Particularly, Zola describes—even if he does not quite know how to explain—the workings of interactive personalities and the dynamics of transpersonal communications at an unconscious level.

3. Drash: *Extrapolating Meaning for a New Age*

In order to make the connection between the mystical ideas expounded in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* and Zola's mid-nineteenth-century French novel, we cannot simply draw the analogies of concern with sexuality and the role of intense passions, such as violence and jealousy; we have to call on other kabbalistic texts in Jewish tradition in order to explore the way in which jealousy, sexuality and suggestibility lead to creative and insightful understandings of the soul and mind. Outrageous as it may seem to compare *The Sacred Letter* and *Thérèse Raquin* on two basic grounds: one, that the author of the *Iggeret* is not concerned at all about romantic love or the complications that arise from its frustration in social circumstances and that Zola has no pretensions of exploring mystical dimensions of the psychotic bind his characters find themselves draw into; there is nevertheless a human imperative—that of discovering the importance of love as an anti-social and dangerous passion, as well as an ameliorative and desirable relationship, and using this understanding to prevent criminal violations and violence and turning individuals away from criminal and self-destructive acts towards more positive and helpful performances.

The crucial link between these two texts and these two conglomerations of human entanglement lies in the concept of jealousy. In its best sense, the jealousy of God means that He becomes insulted by devotees and upholders of the Law participating in *avoda zara*, the non-prescribed or the proscribed worship in the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as acting “as though” they supported foreign gods. It does not mean that other peoples, with their own concepts and customs, are doomed to eternal perdition for their beliefs. In its worst sense, envy, spiteful and petty, suggests a lack of trust in one's partner, one's neighbour and one's own self in attending to the proprieties of the marital contract, and thus leads to thoughts and actions which break the obligations of the covenanted relationship to God. The Jewish tradition assumes as its basis a constitutional society, and hence a community, including God and His servants in the Temple and its cult—or later, in the rationalization of those persons and duties in the ‘as if’ sanctity of rabbinical Judaism—subject to the Law and its rational interpretations democratically (“horizontally” in Faur's expression) interpreted.

classical term ‘character’ referred to a short sketch or play illustrating a dominant type of temperament or social type.

Without adherence to the Law and especially without knowledge (or acknowledgement) of the Law, the passions and performances of love run amok and create disorderly relationships, psychological difficulties, and spiritual emptiness. Particles of soul, mind and intellect escape all confines, crash into one another, and explode into moral chaos.

In secular and psychological novels, plays and poetry of the post-Renaissance world in European civilization the radicalization of individual temperaments is obvious: love removed from ecclesiastical and courtly conventions becomes the most significant factor in establishing and maintaining bourgeois families, with all their social, economic and political implications. Yet at the same time, the development of personalities with an inward turn and a motivating energy driven by sexual desire makes the joining together of male and female extremely complicated, unstable and likely to turn into mutual hostility—the break-up of the loving relationship not only leads to divorce and the severance of the support of parent to children, but also to the threat of personal loss of identity and alienation from society. The jealousy that begins in suspicion of unfaithfulness by one or the other party to a marriage quickly leads to a sense of greater disloyalty, betrayal and active hostility. The husband, to be sure, feels that his property and his reputation are devalued or stolen from him; his public honour and emotional sensitivities are at risk, or already felt to be compromised or tainted. He is not only jealous of his wife's cuckolding him; he is jealous of his role as husband, father and master of the household. The wife, in a somewhat different configuration of humiliations and insults, is also placed in what she feels is an invidious position where her own personal integrity has to be modified in order to preserve her financial viability and her ownership of her children's love. The adulteress and the promiscuous woman, from such a perspective, like the womanizing male, the seducer and the rapist, goes mad.

4. Sod: Reading Inside and Between and Behind the Lines to Reach a Conclusion

The secret sense of a text is discovered in the same way the Israeli Secret Service, *Masod*, operates, by spying out the land beyond the obvious, by sensitive interpretations, by taking apart texts word by word, letter by letter, and even by analysing the shape, size, colour and feel of each blackened and open space on a page. But the root meanings of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs or units of narrative remain intact, only seen as one sees with enhanced vision and intensified skills of interpretation. The married couple unite in domestic love and respect, conscious of God's presence in their midst during the approach and accomplishment of copulation, in order to produce healthy, sane and intelligent children who will carry on the covenant of the Law from generation to generation. The physical act of love-making does not stand for something else

but it is now understood to extend from physical through intellectual to spiritual pleasures so that it includes God as a third party with the husband and wife and also the joining of God and Shekhina. Although it does not stand for some other higher action in a more real eternal dimension, the sexual intercourse makes possible the creation of new life and thus the continuance of the world, that is, the on-going and ever expanding manifestation of the universe. The physical joys of love are enhanced by the wider scope, the deeper meaning and the extension of nature and history into eternity. Just as the coming of Sabbath provides a momentary foretaste of the world-to-come, so the act of love-making is in itself the *tikkun ha-olam* that corrects the explosive flaws in the original act of Genesis, the orgasmic scattering of seeds, the witty and cunning in gathering of energy-filled sparks from the darkest places in creation, and the restoration of peace and harmony of the divine, the necessary pause after the *unio mystica*.

The secret sense of Jewish love is that it is neither Greek as an allegorical depiction of another reality altogether, and altogether beyond apprehension, made approachable only through the veil that is laid over it; not an allegory that unveils and names things by their true, eternal names, but one that hides at ever deeper levels the mystery of mysteries; nor in a Christian sense of a love that purifies, forgives and transforms the bodily experiences of passion in its ambiguity as at once the throes of sexual ecstasy and the unbearable and exquisite pains of crucifixion or conjoins the maternal sorrows of virginity with the infantile shock of being-in-the-world as a mortal being. Instead, Jewish love, hinted at in the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* and obliquely performed in the *Shir ha-Shirim* (Song of Songs) as a ballet of marriage of consciousness and history, a harmony of conception and birth-into-history, and a celebration of nature and law is surely that life reproduces itself from generation to generation, *dor v'dor*, generation taken as both a period of human life-spans and as the game of love-making, and that history expands both forwards into the future and backwards into the past, continuous with the knitting into each performance of love and life-making the renewal of God's presence in this world. It is analogous to, and dependent on, the unrolling of the Torah scrolls and the re-rolling on the twin staves of history and nature, the ever-expanding commentaries on the Torah and the entire *Tanach*, the production and refining of *mishnot* to recollect and re-apply the experiences of a nation-in-exile and renewed in its own land, the spinning out and arguments over the significance of midrashim that speculate, poeticize, moralize and particularize the existential journey through time and space, and the compiling of compendia of the Law, the digests, *responsa* and endless argumentation over the applicability of the Law, the validity of rituals and customs, and the reality of human reason throughout all dimensions of eternity.